The Seligman Swindle

Bob and Gilley were determined to find some peace and quiet. They found property off Interstate 40, near old Route 66 and the town of Seligman, AZ. Eleven miles southwest of Anvil Rock Road – exit 109, they purchased a corner parcel, up against state land, in the Sierra Vista Ranch subdivision. The unimproved land consisted of rolling hills, scrub juniper and sharp eroded arroyos. It was quiet, peaceful and remote. Quite a change from the hustle bustle of Quartzsite.

Tourists were drawn to Seligman, especially after the Disney animated movie, "CARS". Bob was prompted to offer arrow-making demonstrations to local businesses. He made such a hit that the Aztec Motel had a mural painted on one wall depicting Bob as the Arrowmaker. For many years Bob had been friends with Dwight and Marie Forquer, owners of the Aztec Motel.

"She's owned that damn thing since the 1960's…. I used to stop there to sleep cause it was one of the nicest motels in Seligman. I used to sleep there for free. They never charged me because I'd give her some jewelry and rocks and stuff. We were dear friends."

Bob petitioned the county to legally name his access road, Arrowmaker Rd. Soon thereafter they bought a 2002 CAVCO doublewide mobile home. Delivery and set up was a bear!

At the age of 70, Bob had slowed down considerably. Still, he proceeded to make many improvements to the property – such as a solar shed, garden, and flagstone walks. He cut trails and graded a road. Bob was finally able to build himself a proper lapidary workshop.

The site supervisors; Pebbles, Shadow and Midnight; kept a close eye on Bob. However, the pups were not equally vigilant of Gilley.

"You have no idea how many times she'd almost burned our house down! (She'd) put a pan on the stove, turn on the gas then go outside and work on her garden. All of a sudden I start smellin something, and I go in and the damn pan would be all melted and molded around the burner…"

Bob and Pebbles clear the road.

By now any terms of endearment between them were strained and few. Gilley had witnessed one of those blue light apparitions involving Bob and it scared her.

"I kept trying to tell her, just like I've told you what I am…she didn't believe in any kind of religion – nothing. And from that day (on) I'll tell you, she really stood away from me…"

"She never came to visit me when I spent YEARS in the (VA) hospital. (Neighbor) Robin literally dragged her to come see me one time. I went to try and hold her hand and she just reeled back. She didn't even want me to touch her."

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Bob had been in and out of the VA hospital several times and had been advised to move closer to Prescott for medical care. His wife Gilley was 88 and diagnosed with terminal cancer, (unbeknownst to Bob). She was often alone and began to accept help from Dana Thorsness, a friend of her neighbors. In the early summer of 2013, Bob went looking

for a buyer of their property, which consisted of approx. 40 acres with mobile home. Neighbors Mary and Michael Jenkinson knew the Thorsness's were purportedly "homeless", so a scheme was hatched to enable the Thorsness to acquire the Vallejo property, since both Bob and Gilley seemed to be on death's door.

Mike and Mary Jenkinson offered Bob and Gilley a "Promise to Pay" homemade contract. (10 June 2013) Mary drew up a Quitclaim deed that Bob and Gilley signed and was notarized at their bank that reflected a $65K sale promise. (13 June 2013) A week later (20 June 2013) the other party, Mike and Mary Jenkinson had the same Quitclaim notarized (without Bob or Gilley in attendance) with one major change initialed by "MJ": The $65K sale price was lined out and replaced by $10 dollars.

Bob was still waiting for the $65,000 sale price to be paid, so they could sign a bill of sale, and release the warranty deed on the property. Bob had no idea what "those people" were doing behind his back.

No money had changed hands, still the Jenkinson's filed the altered Quitclaim with Yavapai County. (10 July 2013) Bob gives his neighbors written permission (from the VA hospital) to retrieve all his furniture, tools and personal property. However, the new "owners" had already slapped a padlock and NO TRESPASSING sign on the gate, plus blocked the use of the legal easement.

Over the course of 1 week (11 – 17 July 2013) three handwritten notes declare a total of $20K was given to Gilley. No mention if payment was made by cash or check. Gilley signed each one; the last declaration: PAID IN FULL for *land and property*. Each of these handwritten receipts were signed by Gilley and both Mike and Mary Jenkinson. However, Mary's signature was vastly different from her notarized signature; (the signature did resemble trusted friend Dana's handwriting though.)

Four days later (21 July 2013) Mary drew up a second Quitclaim which transferred the Vallejo's property to Dana's son; Robert Ryan Thorsness, for "love and affection".

Bob was still waiting for the $65,000.

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During the chaos of the "Seligman Swindle", Gilley had called on Bob's old Forest Service boss, Lance Rom, for a favor….

"Lance is a genius when it comes to administration work in anthropology. He was really good at it. Lance knew (me) and Gilley very well, however Gilley strained that friendship when she called him, telling him she needed help to move.

"He thought I had left her or died or something. She gave him that impression. This was in 2013; the day I was kicked off my own property. It's been a nightmare ever since."

"She intended not to move. She was going to stay with HER FRIEND up there. I was the one that had to move. I'm the dumb savage, you know, they don't like dumb savages. I had to move. So, Lance cut short his work out of the Kansas office and made that long trip down here to Arizona. When he arrived, I was surprised!"

'What are you doing here?'

'Well, Gilley called and said she had nobody to help her move.'

Gilley was under the assumption she would be staying in her home with her friends, and it was only Bob's belongings that were to be moved out. She was surprised to be taken to a realtor by her friend to secure a rental home on Allerton Way in Chino Valley. Any valuables left behind on Vallejo's property were now in the possession of the new "owners".

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While Bob was laid up in the Veteran's Hospital for up to a year, Gilley was alone and easily susceptible to the predatory habits of swindlers. She grew more fearful and dependent on the neighbors. Gilley was 88 at this time. Her dementia played well into the swindlers scheme to take over the old couple's property. While Gilley freely gave them money for doing chores such as cleaning, shopping and trips to her bank, she also willingly signed homemade documents made by her 'friends'. The swindler's had Gilley sign agreements that transferred all of Bob and Gilley's property (40 acres with mobile home) over to them for $20,000 – paid in full. (Not the $65,000 earlier agreed upon) Only Gilley signed these papers, never Bob. Gilley described her friends as "homeless". The lawyer Bob hired after Gilley died was unable to locate any of the $20K she was supposedly given, in any of the bank accounts she and Bob had. Any verbal agreement between Gilley and her friend's relied on the assumption Bob would die before her.

Bob was still a very sick man when he checked himself out of the Prescott VA, to get home to deal with this chaos.

"My old Betsy (truck) with a 454 engine in it, man it was a good engine. But Gilley gave the truck away. God damn, I could've killed her. They stole everything!"

"While I was moving some of my junk down to Chino Valley and trying to find a place to store my stuff; they'd be (going through my room and workshop) stealing my stuff. And her over there, talkin to them, watching them load up my stuff."

"But that's how those people got to her, they'd get her drunk.

(Personal Input)

I believe Gilley sincerely loved Bob. Her notes that survived relayed as much. She was battling health issues also but could not bring herself to burden her husband with them. Bob spent a lot of time in the VA for his own health problems. Being so far from the nearest medical facility, plus being elderly, infirm and alone; Gilley became a target for swindlers. This is where Gilley's health decline began to affect her ability to reason. That "dual personality" Bob spoke of earlier became more pronounced; especially when accentuated with alcohol.

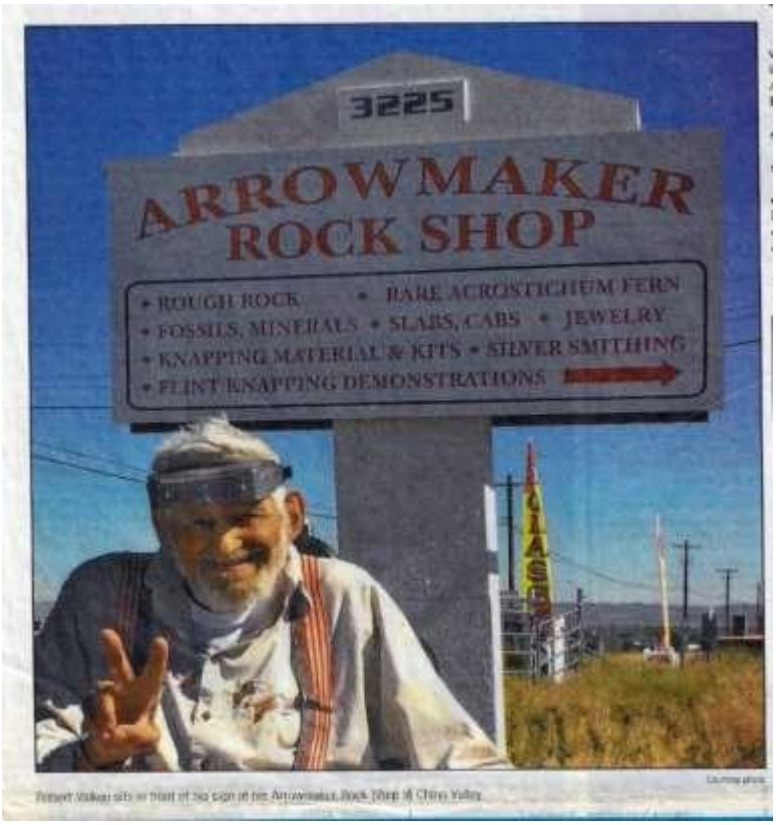
(End Input)

The very month Gilley died, October 2013, the Thorsness Facebook page showed family celebrating at their new home, "the Seligman Ranch". They made monthly payments of $469 to the mortgage company that owned the Vallejo contract on the mobile home. Still, they had no right or agreement to take over payments, with the assumption they would own the mobile home when the loan was paid off. Bob grudgingly let them occupy the property, but he kept up the homeowner's insurance.

After seeing to Gilley's final arrangements, Bob enlisted the aid of a lawyer in Prescott. By July 2015 Bob had filed a "Verified Complaint" lawsuit in Superior Court of Arizona, against the Jenkinson's and the Thorsness's. He gave up the rental property on Allerton Way and lived on the business property he rented in Chino Valley. Storage units next door held his remaining possessions. There he established the "Arrowmaker Rock Shop", the last of a long line of rock shop businesses he had owned since the 1950's. Even while Bob's health, eyesight and mobility hampered his daily life; his love for geology kept his heart strong.

Yet, Bob's snaggle tooth smile was only for public show. He'd curse and throw things when he thought no one was looking. He depended on his Trazadone more often. His eyesight was within legally blind limits… still he drove his truck into town. The stress from "those people" was eclipsed by dealing with a lawyer – who wanted more money, then wanted to get out of representing Bob altogether, in favor of another more lucrative lawsuit.

Anyone interested in the lawsuit can look it up in Yavapai County, AZ. Superior Court case number P1300 CV 202000357, filed 8 April 2020.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While Bob welcomed customers, he also began to take names for lapidary and silver smithing classes. This was when I made my entrance.

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With my current husband in tow, we entered his storefront – heralded by the clanking of an old bell hung over the door.

“Come on in! I’m in here!” Bob hollered - (or as I came to call him - Mr. V).

It was hard to tear myself away from gawking at the display cases full of jewelry. The back wall was covered with Riker mounts, full of turquoise cabochons. Shelves full of slabbed rocks begged to be studied. My impatient husband drew me into the owner’s adjoining office. While he stared at the walls full of medals and citations from the Korean “conflict”, I stood wide eyed before the shop owner. Across the room a grizzled old man turned from his computer screen to face us. I froze for a moment, returning his ‘deer in the headlight’s gaze’. My eyes glanced to a photograph of a stoic, dark eyed soldier from the 1950’s. I pointed silently to it, then to the old man behind the desk.

“Yes, that’s me. I was in Korea.”

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I did not realize it at the time, but I had begun to regrow my spine.